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ABSTRACT

This guidebook for parents and early intervention personnel was developed by the "Let's Play! Project," a 3-year federally supported project that worked to promote play in infants and toddlers with disabilities through the use of "low-tech" assistive technology. The guide is organized around six emerging stages of play development: (1) sensory exploration, (2) functional exploration, (3) material manipulation, (4) pretend/fantasy play, (5) creative expression, and (6) language and pre-literacy. Each section then focuses on one stage of emerging play and includes information on what the child does, what the caregiver does, play materials, and positioning options and adaptations. (DB)

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Birth Through Two

EC 308149

A Guidebook for Parents and Early Intervention Professionals

Let's Play! Project
University at Buffalo
Buffalo, NY 14214

DOE Grant #H024B50051

HOW WE PLAY!

BIRTH THROUGH TWO

The Let's Play Project is a model demonstration grant funded by the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs; #H024B50051. Funding began June 1, 1995 and continues through May, 2000. We began to replicate the model across New York State in 1998. Opinions, materials and references to commercial products do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policy positions of the Department of Education, and no official endorsement by the department should be inferred.

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This publication was prepared cooperatively throughout the duration of the Let's Play! Project and included the input of several Early Intervention professionals. All products are reviewed by parents of children in NYS Early Intervention Programs. The following individuals are recognized for their contributions in the development of this document:

Susan Mistrett, MS Ed	Project Director, Let's Play! Project
Amy Goetz, MS, OTR/L	Project Coordinator, Let's Play! Project
Jan Tona, MS, OTR/L	Faculty, D'Youville College
Susan Lawrence-Dederich, SSLP/CCC	Buffalo Public Schools

Production Consultants: University at Buffalo, Department of Occupational Therapy, Center for Assistive Technology, Media Department

Let's Play! Project
University at Buffalo/ Center for Assistive Technology
515 Kimball Tower
Buffalo, NY 14214
(716) 829-3141 • Fax: (716) 829-3217

Why is Play Important?

This Play Guidebook is intended to assist parents with babies with disabilities and the individuals who provide them with Early Intervention services, with ways to encourage play in the children's lives.

Play is what children do; it is how they grow and learn. The importance of play in a young child's life cannot be over-stated; it impacts all areas of development. However, babies with disabilities often are limited in their opportunities to play. During the time when typically developing children are learning that their actions have an effect on the objects and individuals within the environment, children with disabilities are learning very different lessons. We must identify play materials, supports and strategies that can encourage playful exploration for all children.

The Let's Play! Project looks to provide ideas and strategies to promote play through better access to play materials, and to use assistive technology to give the children this critical access. Typical solutions revolve around "low tech" assistive technology that is broadly defined to include:

- adaptations to commercially available toys making them easier to activate or access
- the use of specially adapted toys and switches
- the use of positioning items that make it easier for the child to sit alone, or lay on his/her tummy or back to play; or to move about his environment
- the use of communication aids for more playful interactions

By building on what the child *can* do, and by creating interactive play environments, families can reclaim play as a critical component of childhood!

As a child grows, play emerges in different ways and forms. This Guidebook is designed with "Emerging Play" stages as an organizational background. This is not meant to indicate that children move sequentially through the stages, but rather to provide a framework to help families build on their knowledge of what their baby likes to do. Children grow at their own rate and often incorporate elements of many types of play in what they do. Knowing the "next step" helps us to support the young player to grow and develop through play.

EMERGING PLAY INCLUDES:

WHAT'S THIS?
Exploring with the Senses
where a child uses his/her body to explore objects.

WHAT DOES IT DO?
Exploring Function
where a child explores a toy to see how s/he can make it"work". Also includes imitation and combination play.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO WITH IT?
Organize, Sort & Build
where a child begins to use materials and incorporate planning, coordination, problem solving and creativity; includes using shapes, sorting and constructive toys

WHAT CAN IT BE?
Pretending
where a child begins to imitate actions seen or heard about and to build on these experiences to create new ones.

WHAT CAN I MAKE?
Creating
where a child interacts with a variety of expressive materials, while combining manipulation, creativity and planning

READ ME A STORY?
Reading & Listening
where a child enjoys listening to language at a very early age. Conversation, rhymes, songs and books are offered. Opportunities to act stories out occur.

Each Emerging Play section includes information on:

- What The Child Does
- What the Caregiver Does
- Play Materials
- Positioning Options & Adaptations

What's This?
Sensory Exploration

WHAT YOUR CHILD DOES

The child uses all of his/her senses to explore objects. S/he gazes, listens to, smells, touches, bats, grabs, pulls at toys and begins to move towards them.

Play materials are first looked at, then touched and finally brought to mouth to further explore. Children having difficulty manipulating toys may prefer highly reactive toys.

Young children explore all objects in the same ways with repetitive movements.

THINGS THE CAREGIVER CAN DO

- Imitate the child's sounds, add inflections to encourage child reactions
- React to the child's signals
- Place the child in different positions for play
- Encourage the child to look at brightly colored objects as they are moved
- Provide opportunities for the child to reach, pull and grasp objects
- Offer toys with different sensory characteristics (vision, sound, texture, vibration)
- Provide opportunities for the child to experience moving through space
- Include the child in conversations and talk about people and actions that are taking place or about to happen

PLAY MATERIALS

What the child is interested in will drive the selection of play materials. Observe to find out what most interests the child. Some like toys with a specific sensory characteristic (visual, auditory or texture); others may "shut down" when presented with too much feedback. Some children prefer toys with multiple characteristics. Look for toys that are easy for the child to interact with: to grab, hold, hang onto and move.

TOY CHARACTERISTICS:

VISUAL

- bright, colorful toys
- calming, pastel-colored toys
- interesting shapes
- a variety of textures
- moving objects: mobiles
- household items: mirrors & shiny objects

SOUND

- musical feedback
- toys that respond when shaken or batted
- toys with bells, chimes
- loud, noisy toys
- household items: spoons, metal rings, bells

TOUCH

- vibration feedback
- soft, plush toys
- toys with texture: one or several
- mylar, cellophane (materials that "krinkle")
- washcloths (wet or dry)
- household items: scrubbies, loofa sponges

HIGHLY REACTIVE TOYS

Look for electronic toys that require minimal touch or voice to "turn on" and have multiple responses: vibrating crab, spider, macarena monkey, etc. The child receives an immediate response to a touch or sound.

ADAPTATIONS

Young children with disabilities may have difficulty getting to play items and using toys. *How the toys are offered* and the *position that a child is in* will influence the child's interactions.

ON BACK/SUPINE

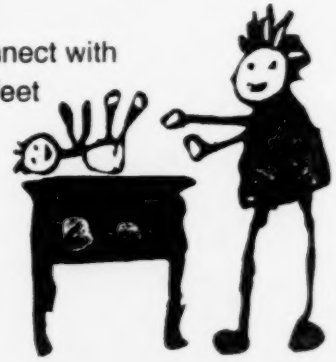
- supports: sling seat (vibrating)
- boppy
- swing
- stroller
- floor blanket
- crib

SUGGESTIONS

- offer toys on overhead or crib gyms

Adaptations

- attachers to lower toys: links, stringers, shoelaces, elastic, snaps
- encourage the child to connect with the objects with hands or feet



ON SIDE

- supports: commercial side-lyers
- against the couch; rolled towels, stuffed animals
- against adult leg

SUGGESTIONS

- place toys where child can see hands interacting
- select toys that stay put and are easily used

ON TUMMY

- supports: prone boppy, rolled towels, pillow roll
- looking over side of bed
- on parent's chest or legs

SUGGESTIONS

- use play mats adapted with greater responses (i.e. bells, mylar, Velcro®, etc.)
- offer highly reactive toys

What Does It Do?
Exploring Function

WHAT YOUR CHILD DOES

A child explores a toy to see how s/he can make it "work". This begins with combination play such as banging toys against each other or a surface, emptying containers (dumping) and knocking blocks down. The child slowly begins to use toys as they are designed to be used; where the toy design "speaks" to them!

Reactive toys are used which are very responsive to a child's manipulation and may offer multiple areas responding in different reactions.

Child begins to understand cause and effect in that specific actions result in specific responses.

THINGS THE CAREGIVER CAN DO

- Provide opportunities for the child to develop balance and movement skills
- Foster independence by encouraging child to pull off socks, use a cup, a spoon
- Provide opportunities for child to find objects that are hidden under blankets, bowls, things to knock over, etc.
- Provide activities to follow the child's lead; drop & fetch, "singing", etc.
- Play peek-a-boo games
- Play games with tickles and touches with anticipated results
- Encourage activities where adult or older sibling follows what the child does; child as leader

PLAY MATERIALS

Children begin to combine objects to see what they can do to elicit different responses. Banging toys against a surface (tray) or each other, finding "hidden" toys, and dumping or pulling toys out of containers are places to start. Children begin to discover what they must do to make a toy work. Setting up opportunities for the child to discover the function of toys can include:

- Providing a variety of surfaces for "banging"
- Containers, blankets other items that can be used with toys
- Toys which require a single, specific movement to make them "go". An immediate and consistent response from the toy is required.

Examples:

- single function: a push-down top, jack in box, sensory switches
- multiple functions: keyboards, busy boxes
- use of switches and toys
- household items: coffee cans, wooden spoons, small blocks in pots, etc.

ADAPTATIONS

Young children most often begin to move in order to get to toys and use them in different ways. For children limited in their ability to independently sit up or get to toys, supports are available to provide opportunities to better discover properties of toys.

SITTING

SUGGESTIONS

- supports: boppy, chair customized with "pool noodles" or rolled towels for support, tri-wall floor sitters, rifton chairs
- trays that work with seating system to place toys on; with a ledge to keep toys within reach
- lean the child against an adult; between legs for support

Adaptations:

- stabilizers: materials that keep the toy in place for easier interaction. Materials can include any non-slip material, Velcro®/showloop or dual lock.
- provide a variety of table and floor surfaces for combination play
- set up opportunities to "find" hidden objects

What Does It Do?
Combining + Imitating

WHAT YOUR CHILD DOES

Functional/Combination
The child begins to use toys in functional combination: shovel and sand or birdseed, spoon and bowl, in/out of containers, putting blocks on top of each other. The combinations are meaningful.

Child shows increasing organization and sequence of actions relevant to play objects.

Functional Imitation
Items are used to imitate real life routines. At first the action is directed toward the child her/himself. This includes pretending to be asleep, pretend eating or drinking from a cup, demonstrating emotions when asked (show me a happy face), etc.

Child begins to mimic routines with others, i.e. offering a cookie to another, puts brush to own or another's hair, etc.

THINGS THE CAREGIVER CAN DO

- Provide opportunities to interact with a variety of materials: waterplay, sand, etc.
- Demonstrate how items can be used in combination then fosters independence
- Suggest combinations: child can roll the ball down the slide/through tunnel
- Describe what is taking place and promote dramatic happenings
- Offer miniature props to child and promote "pretend" activities
- Encourage pretend play by describing it and "taking turns" with the child
- Join in dress-up, play different roles, suggest and expand play situations

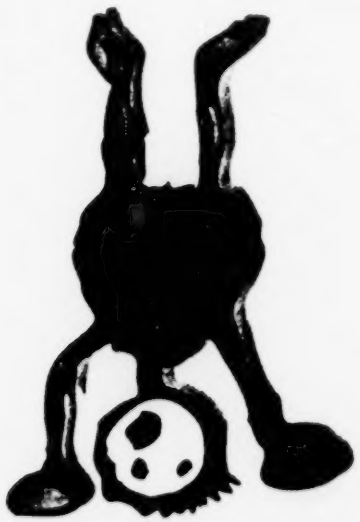
PLAY MATERIALS

Functional - Combination

- combination: musical instruments, coffee cans/balls, scoop materials, stackable objects - rolling ball back & forth; balls pushing blocks down
- bathtub funnels, cups, sifters
- stacking items
- large motor settings: tunnels, slides

Functional Imitation

- kitchen sets, plastic food (Velcro® fruit), hats, etc.
- purses with "purse items" for in/out
- empty milk cartons for "pouring"; cereal boxes, cans
- rocking horses, ride-on toys



ADAPTATIONS

SUGGESTIONS

Adaptations

- *confinement* materials to keep toys with reach: boxtops, planters, hula hoops, trays with lips

Switch Use

- look for a variety of switches requiring different movements; up to 2 switch choices
- switch toys- where switch is separate from to
    - horizontal or vertical toys
    - promotes less direct cause and effect
- consider other switch toy activities: i.e. toy goes into box, toy knocks blocks down, pushes cup along, etc.
- use of single message switches adds choices and dramatic emphasis to play
- use of switch toys and message combinations
- use of puppets, etc. to modify/expand switch toys
- Velcro® mitts help to hold kitchen utensils and tools

What Else Can I Do With It?
Organize, Sort & Build

WHAT YOUR CHILD DOES

Organize, Sort & Build
Child begins to use materials and incorporate planning, coordination, problem solving and creativity. Materials are used in simple and then more complex ways. Children manipulate objects in a variety of ways:

Shapes & Sorters
Matching and contrasting shapes and sizes characterize these toys. A wide range of items is found, from same size single shapes to varied shape sorters.

Construction
Young children begin constructing by placing items on top of or next to each other. Stringing pieces with cording or tubing is a type of construction.

THINGS THE CAREGIVER CAN DO

- Provides a variety of materials that can be combined and balanced
- Describes spatially where the object is being placed; "up on top", "next to the big red block"
- Encourages the child to build it even "higher" or "bigger"
- Takes turns creating something together
- Demonstrates and supports problem solving efforts by the child; turn the puzzle piece slowly until it fits
- Shows the child pride in his/her accomplishments, expands situations

PLAY MATERIALS

Shapes & Sorters: same shape and then differing shape puzzles; 3D puzzles and sorters should be tried before 2D (i.e. puzzle pieces)

- look for interesting sorting materials- try sorting by color, texture, size, etc.

Construction materials: Any object that can be stacked on top of another or next to an object is considered construction.

- stackers that "stay" are preferred- i.e. baby duplos
- foam, Velcro® and magnet blocks support early success
- large "brick" blocks are fun to build and walk on
- large, soft fabric blocks knock down easily

ADAPTATIONS

- *confinement* materials (boxtops, lids, containers) may assist in keeping smaller pieces within reach
- *stabilizers* can keep bases still, making it easier to build
- larger blocks and pieces may be easier to build and stack with
- a variety of container heights make sorting more interesting
- computer software is available for manipulating playdough, Lego's and puzzles
- adapt the computer with:
    - easy to use trackballs
    - one key/click control
    - switch interfaces

What Can It Be?
Pretending

WHAT YOUR CHILD DOES

Pretend/Symbolic Play
The child begins to imitate actions seen or heard about and to build on these experiences to create new ones. Using theme environments (farms, airports, drive-through restaurants) helps the child to re-create experiences and routines. Language is developed through these experiences.

Props (miniatures of real life objects) are used throughout the play experiences of a child to enhance imagination.

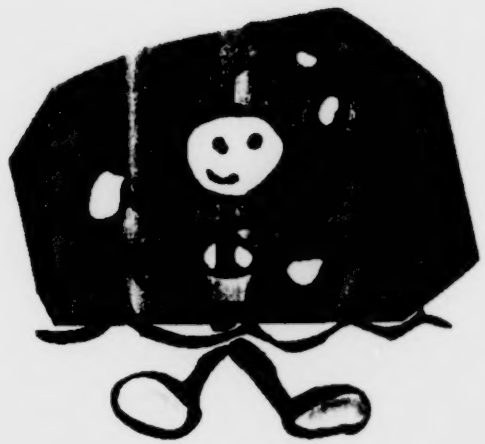
As children get older, the representational objects get increasingly abstract- i.e. the child uses a peg for a bottle.

THINGS THE CAREGIVER CAN DO

- Describes what is taking place and promote dramatic happenings
- Introduces new objects/ideas to expand play routines
- Asks questions: what is he going to eat? "good guys and bad guys" are introduced
- Demonstrates combining construction and props to create new environments

PLAY MATERIALS

- total play environments that include related people and props: farm, garage, airport, etc.
- thematic props for camping, kitchen play, shaving, going to work, playing doctor, etc.
- use pretend materials in combination with construction materials; encourage child to mimic/pretend everyday routines
- consider costumes and dress-up clothes; hats



ADAPTATIONS

SUGGESTIONS

- create play environments that everyone can be in and interact in
- blankets over couches or tables
- tents, cubes, tunnels
- store items in easy to access bins that children can reach in
- program communication devices to set up pretend interactions

What Can I Make?

Creative Expression
Children participate in interacting with a variety of expressive materials where they combine manipulation, creativity and planning

- Provide a wide range of media to interact with; a variety of textures and substances
- Provide different surfaces and papers to work on
- Provide an area which is set up for creating: easy clean up, useable/accessible tools
- Encourage the child to describe what s/he is creating
- Suggest the combination of different processes and materials; sit with child to model new options
- Display creations when appropriate

- materials for direct manipulation: playdough, clay, finger-paints, sand, nature items, chalk

- tools for design: cookie cutters, rollers, paintbrushes, markers, q-tips, glue

- surfaces: paperplates, different papers, tables, mirrors, sidewalks, bathtubs, sidewalks, etc.

- consider a variety of environments for creative play: inside, outside, playground, beach, etc.

SUGGESTIONS

- easel and wrist pads to make it easier to paint

- adapted handles, build-up extensions for brushes and markers

- portable art trays to keep messy or small materials within reach

- floor tables

- computer software which provides painting, play-dough, clay and other activities

- adapt the computer with:
    - easy to use trackballs
    - one key/click control
    - touch screens

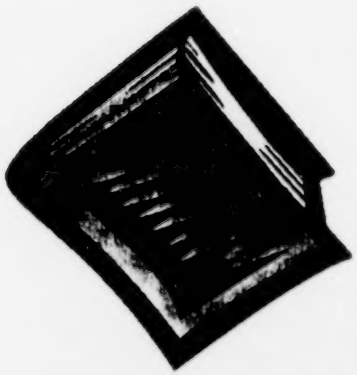
Read Me a Story?
Reading & Listening

WHAT YOUR CHILD DOES

Literacy Development

Children enjoy listening to language at a very early age. Conversation, rhymes, songs and books are offered. Opportunities to "act out" stories or characters are promoted.

Early literacy opportunities have been shown to positively influence the total developmental process.



THINGS THE CAREGIVER CAN DO

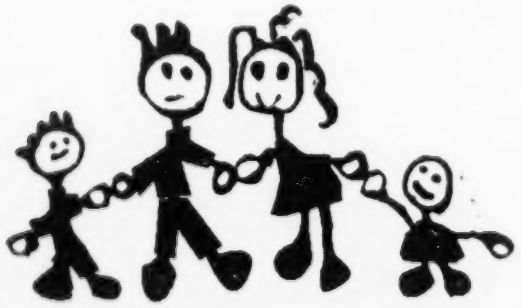
- Find a warm cozy, quiet place
- Kiss, cuddle, hug as the child is read or recited to
- Make reading part of the daily routine- before a nap, when parents get home from work, etc.
- Provide books that are easy to hold and turn pages
- Point to objects in the pictures as you read; ask the child to find certain pictures; use real objects to help associate with pictures
- Let the child choose a book; provides a handy space for books
- Provide cues/ communication systems for selecting a favorite book

PLAY MATERIALS

All communication efforts including nursery rhymes, finger plays and "nonsense" language provide the basis of literacy.

Books:

- begin with books with photographs of real people and objects; limit the number of objects on a page
    - make your own with photo sheets or purchase commercial cloth or plastic covered ones
- board and cloth books are durable and easier to handle
- picture books with clear illustrations and few words
- books with digitized buttons add interest and sound effects
- picture storybooks appeal to preschool children



ADAPTATIONS

SUGGESTIONS

Adaptations

- page fluffers make pages easy to turn
- stabilize the book on a table surface; use Velcro® on covers, shoelace through the spine, etc.
- software storybook programs, known as "lapware", give the parent/child an opportunity to read a book and turn the pages together. For older children, clicking on pictures and words results in the animation of the object "clicked".
- adapt the computer with:
    - easier to use trackballs
    - one key/click control
    - computer interfaces for switches

Emerging Play